

Tree planting at Abernethy — is it needed?

Sir, — In 1994 I was invited to give my opinion on the state of upper Glen Feshie, was it suffering from the impacts of too many deer? It was. Bare soil was being created, screes were disturbed and expanding in area, heather slopes were obviously tracked and there were no tree or shrub saplings outside of fenced enclosures.

In 2009, on holiday, I walked again up Glen Feshie and was amazed at the changes. Bare soil and scree were stable and colonised by vegetation, tracks were overgrown and there were Scots pine, rowan and birch saplings everywhere. Tree saplings were also common at Rothiemurchus and Abernethy east and north of Ryvoan pass. Why?

I have been monitoring a small moorland

catchment in the Peak District, England, since the mid-1960s. A hard winter and poor lambing season in 1969 reduced the number of sheep grazing the catchment by between one-quarter and one-third. That grazing intensity was maintained thereafter. Since then bare, eroding soil has been colonised by vegetation and rowan and birch have come back.

The Glen Feshie estate was most helpful in answering my queries.

It was as I thought. The deer had been culled to an extent that allowed the land to recover and saplings to grow.

Deer had also been culled on the Rothiemurchus and Abernethy estates.

I was surprised therefore when I learnt that it

was proposed to plant trees at Abernethy. The native trees are already coming back and in 2015 I saw there are many healthy saplings growing on the Abernethy estate to the east and south of Ryvoan Pass.

If deer numbers continue to be controlled, the Caledonian pinewood will expand without the expense of planting and, more importantly, retain the unique genetic characteristics of the pinewood found here.

Yours etc,

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